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ABSTRACT

Rapid change, shifting values, and booming technology are existing societal dimensions having an effect on the student population of the future. The nature of education needs to be changed because of technological advancements, declining enrollment, and changes in work attitudes. Educators must become aware of the speed of change and its drastic effects upon society, and particularly on the student. Educational leaders should be aware that today's actions and decisions determine the future of education, and that the student of the future will depend largely on the interplay among future political, economic, and social trends. (SAS)

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The Student of the Future: A Profile

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Abstract

The student of tomorrow will be the product from the interplay of dominate social and cultural forces occurring within society today. The resulting interaction creates noticeable changes within the social order which, in turn, are reflected in the schools. This paper explores some of the existing social and psychological dimensions of society which have implications for describing the student of the future.

The Student of the Future: A Profile

In contemporary society relatively few Americans consciously think about the significance of social change. The rate of change currently being experienced by society has produced disastrous consequences for people and institutions unprepared to cope with the shock or impact. Within the last twenty-five years, the element of change has permeated society with such accelerating speed and force that it has caused society to be in a constant state of flux which has produced many aspects of life not to endure from generation to generation. We, the American society, value scientific innovation and technological change, but this continual innovation may be a source of strain where many of our "typically" American attitudes, values, behaviors, and social institutions can be interpreted as being attempts to adapt to the stress caused by the constant element of change.

Throughout the history of American society, our social order has been flexible enough to respond to changes as society demanded. The system, which inculcated the concept of growth and progress as desirable and essential, responded to the challenges and demands in such a way so as to promote progress and development. Today, however, society is faced with a different situation where the element of change is now

a problem with which society must contend rather than being a solution to its ills. This constant rate of change portends massive adjustments within all areas of our social order, particularly within the educational realm.

Pressures from our contemporary society produce many changes in our social institutions, and the pressures from such change, in turn, affect contemporary society. Many institutions react to changes that already have occurred (rather than anticipating change) and probably the most obvious example would be our educational institutions. The educational environment provided for the college and university student often receives full impact of social change, and in an effort to determine what type of student will be in the future, we must pay attention to factors arising out of the general culture and social organization. In order to describe the student of the future, we must look at the forces of action that are coming into play because the interaction of these forces will produce effects that will be felt throughout society for the next several decades. There appear suitable areas which illustrate the effects that change has on the student, and by assessing this impact a description of the future student may be obtained. Evidence for composing the profile may be found from analyzing the consequences that change has had on society within the

demographic trends, work force, social institutions, and mankind and his values.

Demographic Trends

The most overwhelming evidence of change on society that possibly carries the most impact for education may be seen in the demographic trends now emerging. Characteristic of the United States population is the high degree of ethnic and racial heterogeneity coupled by important regional differences. In this pluralistic society, the result is the creation of a multi-cultural, multi-racial society in which almost every nationality and race can be found. Another characteristic is that the population is becoming increasingly urban with approximately seventy percent of the population now living in metropolitan areas. From a nation which was predominately rural and agricultural, the nation has now become one of urban dwellers relying largely upon the use of technology to provide the necessities of life. The shift may be also attributed to changes in the economy, increased industrialization, and better work opportunities and advancements.

These, in turn, have created a mobile society, which produces implications affecting the student and educational

planning. The ease with which population moves creates problems and uncertainty for education mainly because the impact of this mobility occurs at the state and local levels. Between sixteen and eighteen percent of the U.S. population moves annually and the trend is toward a movement out of center city and into suburban and rural areas. Problems from this movement include that the tax base may be inadequate to meet the demands of the people and that the social values of the new migrants may be substantially at odds with those of the local people.[1]

In addition, the significant decline of the birthrate from the past eighteen years carries some impact for the schools. The future enrollments in the elementary school will drop about ten percent because twenty-eight percent fewer children are being born now than were born in 1959. Another drop of about seven or eight percent by the mid-1980's is forecasted,[2] and this decrease will affect every level of the educational system from pre-school to post-secondary training.

Work Force

Along with changes in the population are the simultaneous changes occurring in the labor force. Noticeable changes in the increase in numbers as well as the composition

may be observed. Since 1950 the number of employed males has increased twenty-six percent, but the number of female workers has soared to ninety-three percent for the same period.[3] The unprecedented numbers of women entering the labor force during the 1970's began one of the most dramatic periods in history of the role of women in the United States. Women between twenty-five to thirty-four years of age composed the most spectacular increase in labor force participation with their participation rate rising to sixty-eight percent in 1978. This is of particular importance because seventy percent of this age group were married and had dependent children under age eighteen at home. Married women accounted for the largest part of the increase in participation while twenty-five percent of all women workers were single and ten percent were divorced. The reasons for this upsurge of employment are not clear, but women can now be found in every job category within the work arena.[4] However the impact from this upsurge of employment is clear because of the profound influence that it has on the educational scene. The shifting roles that women assume as they enter the work force create a demand for curriculum changes to prepare women for their entry. Changes on all levels, from secondary into graduate schools, reflect the impact that women now have on the curriculum.

For many people already participating in the work force, change resulting from the knowledge explosion of recent decades means a constant updating of knowledge peculiar to their own expertise in making a living. This is particularly true for many professions such as law, medicine, engineering, and the true sciences where practitioners experience the doubling of knowledge in their respective fields every ten to fifteen years. For example, in the medical profession an estimated two million pages of technical literature and about one hundred seventy thousand medical abstracts are published annually. The job of reading and digesting this massive quantity of supposedly new knowledge and techniques is at once observed as an impossibility of the practitioner to keep abreast and current in his profession. Hence, specialization is increasingly demanded of the practitioner as a means to keep current within a particular field of activity and study. A similar condition prevails within the legal profession where new categories of specialized knowledge compete with the older doctrines, illustrative of which are the revenue or tax laws, consumer protection laws, civil rights and anti-discrimination laws, and a whole revamped and amended system of procedural laws for use in attempting to assure justice to people.

Social Institutions

Another way that the element of change penetrates society is through the social institutions. Among those most directly affected by change have been the schools, the homes, and the economic structures. Demands from contemporary society have produced changes in these social institutions, and the pressures from such change, in turn, have affected the social order. Unfortunately, the sought-after modification usually takes its toll in another social institution, and the subsequent condition is much like a ricochet effect where implications from the change constantly reverberate. Illustrative of this effect are many of the recent social movements that have occurred in the United States. Such movements as the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, and the affirmative action movement resulted from pressure to achieve greater personal security and welfare until legislation was passed and the laws were modified or changed as a result of society exerting the pressure for such change.

From the many changes found within society, the social character of the United States has shifted slowly to being more self affirmative while the spirit has become more meritocratic.[5] This image is reflected in all institutions where reverberations of varying degree are felt, but it

is especially noticeable in the family unit. The traditional family of mother, father, and children is changing rapidly into the single-parent family. Approximately forty-five percent of children born in 1976 will live with a single parent for some time before reaching eighteen years of age. Since 1950 the number of female-headed families with children has increased by over 250 percent. Consequently, the home, the family, the neighborhoods, and even the churches are beginning to relinquish their power as socializing influences. All are becoming engulfed in the rapidity of change, so much so that they are no longer recognized as the "pillars of society."

Mankind and Values

In addition to the recipients mentioned above, mankind eventually receives the impact of change. The rapid pace of social change has both a physical and psychological effect on him. Because of increased urbanization, geographical mobility, frequent job shifts, and shorter work hours, the nature of human relationships has dramatically shifted. An increase in the number of provisional relationships and brief personal encounters results from the constant fluidity found in contemporary society. The longlasting interpersonal

involvements once characteristic of American life are now overshadowed by short temporary relationships causing the manner in which individuals relate to one another to be in as much a state of flux as society.[6] As a result a number of basic American values upheld throughout the development of this country are now being seriously questioned, and the evidence is overwhelming that a number of them will no longer be tenable positions. The traditional rural values that included fundamentalist religious beliefs and an ethic of hard work and self-sacrifice for the family have transformed into more modern urban self-oriented ones.[7] Because of technological advancements and education encouraging the aspiration of higher status, individuals of all classes are breaking many of the old taboos and experiencing more of life's assets once reserved only for the wealthy. The negative traits of self-centeredness and greediness coupled by rebellion toward authority are rapidly emerging, and probably will serve to undermine the traditional character. Many of these traits are found in children today who are growing up faster socially and psychologically, but not physically. Although teachers and parents tend to attribute this social precocity to television or peer pressure, greater impact comes from intense changes in societal structure. As a result, many of the so-called "typical" American lifestyles

are examples of attempts by society to adjust and to adapt to the stress caused by the element of change.

Profile of the Future Student

Rather than reacting to the element of change as we have in the past, we must now begin to anticipate change and assess its probable impact by identifying potential consequences that may be experienced by the student population in the future. From analyzing the impact that change has already had on society, we may extrapolate a profile of the student who will occupy the educational institutions within the near future.

Children born this year will be in the graduating class of the year 2000. Significant changes will occur between now and the end of the century -- changes more dramatic and intense perhaps than those which have occurred in the last twenty-one years since Sputnik shocked us into the space age. Future conditions in all sectors of society coupled by accompanying expectations will demand much of the student. He will have to face a staggering rate of change that will certainly gain momentum throughout the coming decades, and which will have impact on him personally.

The rate of change will be evident within the population characteristics which undoubtedly will affect the

student and the schools. The decreasing numbers of young people will require that adjustments be made in all areas of education. One outstanding characteristic of the future student results from the free moving society and its changing values. These liquid conditions cause him to surge for more job mobility and search for work that will offer possibilities for fashioning his own destiny. He will be more sophisticated from having been exposed to greater diversity in life and will have a different value system. More work options will be available to him, and since serial careers will become acceptable by society, he may return to the classroom more readily for retraining.[8] Changes in work values will generate an increased desire on the part of women and other minorities to seek more managerial positions. The acceptance of women into all phases of management and business will increase substantially the number of women preparing to enter the work force. All students, however, will seek jobs which will encourage individuality, self-growth, and opportunities for learning.

The student of this fast-changing culture will demand

a change in the educational system's orientation to the learning process. The realization of the Learning Society will have taken root during his early age and will more likely transform the meaning of learning for him; he will interpret learning as a process of preparing one to deal with new situations.[9] Because of the demand to adapt to the constant rate of change, he will not be interested in the facts and findings, but in procedures and processes; he will not want organized data, but will want organizational skills; he will not need storage, but will need processing. Finally, he will not be a passive learner (an archives of data) but instead will be self-generated, creative, and an active learner.[10]

Since the student will be a product of a technologically dominated world, he will possess certain expectations regarding the learning environment. These expectations result largely from his over exposure to technology commonly found in society. Typically, the youth of today have always known television and live in a milieu of message saturation unimagined several years ago. The student of tomorrow is of that generation and will expect a mediated school world throughout all levels because he always has been in one. Availability of technology will produce the expectation of using ultra-electronic devices

that will aid in his learning procedure. This technological sophistication, however, will produce an increasing quest on the part of the student for more meaningful education.

In conclusion, it is evident that educators will face a different type of student within the future. Educators must become aware of the rapidity of change and its drastic effects upon society, and particularly upon the student. They will have to assess what the student wishes to do with his professional life and strive to provide opportunities for achievement, personal growth, and self-fulfillment. Many of our educational leaders have the misconception that solutions to problems lie in the future. The solutions actually are found now -- in the present -- and will carry great impact by being the determining factors for future educational years. The educational decisions made today will have reverberations which will be felt well into the twenty-first century. Today's actions and decisions determine tomorrow's world; consequently, it would be wise for educational leaders to anticipate that the future of education and its new breed of student will depend largely upon the interplay among the political future, the economic future, and the social future. The educational environment will hinge as much upon external conditions as upon internal ones.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Joseph F. Coates, "Population and Education: How Demographic Trends Will Shape the U.S.", 1999 The World of Tomorrow, ed. Edward Cornish, (Washington, D.C." World Future Society, 1978), 93-99.

[2]Ibid.

[3]William Abbot, "Working in the Year 2001," 1999 The World of Tomorrow, ed. Edward Cornish, (Washington, D.C.: World Future Society, 1978), 99-104.

[4]Omaha (Nebraska) World-Herald, 9 September 1979.

[5]Michael Maccoby, "Leadership Needs of the 1980s," Perspectives on Leadership in Current Issues in Higher Education, 1979, (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education), 17-23.

[6]Richard L. Sartore, "Interpersonal Relations: A Changing Trend," Education Tomorrow 1 (Spring 1977): 2.

[7]Maccoby, p. 20.

[8]See for example William A. Small, "Summer Session Programs of the 1980's," Education Tomorrow 3 (June 1978), 1; Ron Abrell, "Educational Leadership in the 21st Century," Education Tomorrow 3 (October 1978), 1; and Robert Case and Richard Parsons, "An Educational Imperative for the Future," Education Tomorrow 3 (August 1978), 1.

[9]Judith M. Barnet, "Learning: In Crisis the World Over," Phi Delta Kappan 61 (October 1979), 112-114.

[10]Case and Parsons, p. 5.